

Inspection Connection

Seafood Inspection Program • U.S. Department of Commerce/NOAA

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Retail Demand Heating Up!

by Kimberly Young

For many years the USDC Seafood Inspection Program has offered its services to the retail seafood sector. The Program provides participants with a variety of inspection services, approved specifications and labels, specialized marks for use on products, and advertising literature. But never before has the demand for inspected product been so intense in the retail sector.

Retailers requiring their suppliers to provide inspected product range from the local family grocery store to gourmet markets, nationwide. For example, Kroger, the nation's largest supermarket chain, has been associated with the Program for over 10 years and requires that all fresh and frozen seafood be lot inspected. Not only do their requirements cover domestic product, but they also request USDC involvement in their international supply as well.

Another service that we offer is the Retail HACCP Program. Giant Eagle, a mid-Atlantic supermarket chain, entered our program last year. With this service, tailored to their needs, Giant Eagle has a system in place to standardize their seafood handling and sanitation procedures with periodic audits from the USDC. They are enthusiastic about the Program and have seen the benefits in providing a safe, wholesome, high quality, properly labeled product.

Safeway has also contracted with USDC to review and approve their buyer specifications for seafood. The number of specifications can vary. Typically, specifications are developed at the corporate level and product is purchased for all districts and stores. However, the districts or individual stores may buy from suppliers unknown to their corporate level. Hence, the USDC is in the process of developing generic buyer specifications that can be used by any retailer. Similarly, Albertson's, which has more than 2,400 stores nationwide, has worked hard to develop and enforce their numerous seafood specifications. Albertson's contracts with USDC to lot inspect their fresh and frozen product to their specifications on request.

With national seafood consumption at 15.3 pounds per person, stores across the United States are increasingly seeking USDC assistance in providing quality product to their consumers. Winn Dixie, serving 12 southern states with 1,200 stores, has worked with the USDC to modify their seafood specifications and have labels approved. This is part of Winn Dixie's program to improve the quality of the seafood it markets. Winn Dixie will be requiring their suppliers to provide USDC lot inspected product to their stores.

These are a few of the retailers committing themselves to quality and passing it on to their consumers. The USDC is actively involved in assisting national and regional retailers in developing and revising their specifications. The amount of USDC inspected product in the marketplace provides additional assurances that retailers and their consumers are receiving the consistent quality they expect.



What Going on with the Transfer?

by Sam McKeen

We continue to receive questions about the proposed transfer of the voluntary Seafood Inspection Program to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The “high-water mark” in this process to date occurred on April 29, 1999, when the President submitted legislation to the Congress to transfer the Seafood Inspection Program, in its entirety, to FDA as a Performance-Based Organization. Although a substantial number of discussions have occurred subsequently, the bill has not been formally introduced.

On January 19, 2001, the President’s Council on Food Safety submitted its Federal Food Safety Strategic Plan to the President. This Plan contains a section on Organizational Analysis which addresses the topic of streamlining existing programs. It states the assumption that “no matter what organizational approach is taken, Federal food safety agencies will continue efforts to streamline or consolidate specific Federal food safety functions.... Examples of areas that should be examined for the possibility of streamlining or consolidation include...seafood...”

The new Administration continues to fill key policy positions, including those within the Department of Commerce. We are not aware of recent policy discussions regarding the desirability of transferring the voluntary Seafood Inspection Program to FDA. This remains a logical and viable approach for improving the delivery of Federal services. Such a transfer can achieve efficiencies and operating economies while benefitting seafood consumers, Program participants, FDA and the Inspection Program, and taxpayers in general.

The Inspection Program continues to support the transfer to FDA in order to combine Federal seafood safety and inspection programs into a single Federal agency. We will communicate developments as they occur in subsequent editions of the Inspection Connection. During the interim, the Program continues to offer services from its current home within Commerce, NOAA, NMFS.

Pay Your Inspection Bill Online

by Rita Creitz

Last year, the USDC Inspection Program was selected by the U.S. Treasury Department as one of only three agencies to develop and test a pilot program for Treasury's PAY.GOV website. This website, designed to provide collection services for all Federal agencies, will allow interested Inspection Program customers to pay their inspection services bill via the internet. The site will be completely secure and will be monitored by the Treasury Department. Customers registered in the program will receive an e-mail notice that they have a bill available for payment. They will be able to view, print, and pay the bill online using credit card or bank transfer. Customers who wish to pay their bill via check will be able to print the bill and mail their payment to the Inspection Program's account as usual.

This exciting customer service option is planned to be available for use by the Summer of 2001. Stay tuned for more updates!



Defense Supply Verifications

by Brian Lynch

The Seafood Inspection Program is approaching its second year of performing seafood quality audits for DSCP (the Defense Supply Center, Philadelphia)... formerly DPSC. These audits were initiated to verify whether food commodities, supplied through the Prime Vendor system, conform with DSCP requirements.

A "Food Team" concept, implemented in February of this year, provides for a specialist for each commodity being audited (meat, poultry, seafood and fruits/vegetables) to be present. Each specialist leads the audit for his/her commodity and other team members assist with sample preparation and data entry.

To date, audits have been performed throughout the contiguous 48 states, as well as Alaska. DSCP began a series of follow-up audits at Prime Vendor locations in December 2000. Food Team audit findings have had effects all the way back to processors who supply these Prime Vendors. More and more processors have chosen to secure some level of inspection and certification for their seafood products to ensure that they comply with DSCP requirements.

Agribuys

by Kimberly Young

In February, the Seafood Inspection Program entered into an agreement with Agribuys.com to be featured on their global e-procurement website for the food industry.

This feature should be available by early April. As a featured service, the



USDC marks and services will be available to the industry on a request basis. Customers need only to select the Program's website to request inspection services.

Both Agribuys.com and the Seafood Inspection Program are enthusiastic about the benefits that such a partnership can bring to industry members. The capability for customers to request services at the click of button not only saves time but can greatly increase the quality of seafood products sold via e-commerce.

We look forward to a long and constructive relationship with Agribuys.com to the mutual benefit of the industry and consumers.

Question Corner



What is the USDC HACCP QMP Program?



This is a program that combines the elements of internationally recognized quality standards with a HACCP-based program designed to control safety, quality, wholesomeness and proper labeling.



Does the USDC Seafood Inspection Program offer laboratory services?



Yes. The Program is equipped to provide rapid test methodologies for various chemical and microbiological evaluations of seafood safety and quality.

(Questions for the Inspection Connection may be mailed to Kimberly Young, USDC/NOAA/Seafood Inspection Program, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 10860, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or e-mailed via our web page at seafood.nmfs.noaa.gov)



Sensory Science Activities

by Terri Reilly/Ken Aadsen

The sensory science team has recently hosted several training workshops for program inspectors, industry participants, and other government personnel. USDC inspectors were the primary attendees at recent international harmonization workshops in Bell, California, and Gloucester, Massachusetts, during which the participants sensory skills were calibrated to three sensory experts. Other participating government agencies included the Food and Drug Administration, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), and the South African Bureau of Standards. International representation reflects the ongoing efforts of regulatory authorities to establish a common language of sensory evaluation and application of the science to seafood products throughout the world.

Two sensory courses were recently conducted in Weisbaden, Germany, at the request of the U.S. Army Veterinary Service. These courses were included in a general food inspection workshop for Army inspectors stationed in Europe. A similar training session was presented to Army personnel in Gloucester last year.

The International Association of Fish Inspectors is currently soliciting interest in a Sensory Evaluation Workshop for Canned Tuna to be conducted by sensory experts from CFIA, FDA, and USDC. The proposed training will be held in conjunction with the 4th International Congress on Fish Inspection and Quality Control scheduled for October 2001 in Vancouver, Canada.

An industry workshop for canned tuna processors will be conducted by FDA-USDC in Seattle in April 2001.

Customer Service Team

by Monty Berg

Last year produced numerous opportunities for the Customer Service Team and the Inspection Program as a whole. The Program experienced a rush of requests from companies wanting information on the inspection requirements of retailers, restaurant chains and products produced for the military. As more and more retailers see the benefits of inspection services for the products they buy, the industry is responding proportionately. Coupled with USDA commodity purchases and inspection requests on products going to DSCP, we have been inundated with service requests in some areas - - a busy but most welcome series of events.

The Customer Service Team is looking forward to working with all parties in the seafood arena during the coming year. We will deliver the best we have to offer our customers each and every day, no exceptions.



Training Continues

by Karla Ruzicka

Training and Education Services - - The Seafood Inspection Program provides a wide array of seafood training and education programs both for Program staff and directed toward the seafood industry. These courses help companies improve the quality and safety of seafood sold to consumers.

Sensory Training - - The Sensory Training group is a highly specialized group focusing on sensory quality evaluation training. Based on a science that is evolving internationally, Seafood Sensory Workshops are offered several times a year. The courses presented to the industry are based on programs developed to harmonize fisheries inspection personnel throughout the world.

Supermarket and Restaurant Training - - The Program also offers their nationally renown 3-day HACCP Workshops for the Seafood Industry, Supermarket and Restaurant Seafood Education Workshops, has recently become involved with the FDA State Training Team, and offers Food Code Training.

New: Food Code Course

The Food Code course is a 4-day program designed for both regulators and industry personnel to become more familiar with this baseline document presented for adoption by state, local, territorial and tribal authorities. Updated every 2 years and presented at the Conference for Food Protection, the Food Code is a valuable tool for states interested in harmonizing food and inspection requirements.

Courses are routinely offered at our Gloucester facility and can be conducted on-site at a firm's corporate location or training facility.



Calendar

HACCP Workshops for Industry

The Industry HACCP course is an intense three day course that covers all aspects of the HACCP concept as it relates to seafood harvesting, processing, transporting, distributing and retailing.

April

17-19 Gloucester, MA
24-26 Seattle, WA

May

8-10 Los Angeles, CA
22-24 Baltimore, MD

Sensory Workshop

April 17-19 Seattle, WA

Upcoming Trade Shows

Look for our booth at the following shows:

Marine Hotel Association
April 29 - May 1
Naples, FL
Booth #105

American School Food Service Association
July 16-18
Nashville, TN
Booth #677

Seafood Processing Europe
April 24-26
Brussels, Belgium
Booth #1247

West Coast Seafood Show
October 7-9
Los Angeles, CA
Booth #429

Trawling the Net

Check out everything you need to know about e-procurement for the food industry at **Agribuys.com**.

Need fisheries statistics? Have fishery economic questions? Visit the NMFS Fisheries Statistics and Economics Division website. This site provides access to key databases (commercial fisheries landings, foreign trade, marine recreational fisheries catch and effort), and contains relevant links and references.

www.st.nmfs.gov/st1



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